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Syretta Spears

University of Central Florida, Syretta.Spears@ucf.edu

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From My First-hand Experience, Unhealthy Sugar Habit is Hard to Break

By Syretta Spears

UCF Forum columnist

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“We need to recognize the concerns that sugar places upon our quality of life,” writes Syretta Spears, an assistant director of the UCF Simulation, Technology, Innovation and Modeling Center .



Hidden sugar has kept me on and off the health and fitness wagon for most of my adult life.

I set the stage for success—balanced meals, gym memberships, etc.—only to end up miserably falling from the back of the wagon, but for a long time never fully understanding why.

Sugar—and more sneakily hidden sugar—was a key cause of my past downfalls. Discovering this little devil in the details and how it affects my body has helped me break the desire for sugar and change my health status to be the healthiest version of me I can be.

It's often difficult for me to fathom, but there are some people who rarely crave or feel a great need for sugar.

While refined sugars give us initial bliss and keep us wanting more, we seldom realize this sugar-monster is slowly robbing us of our health.

Decades ago Americans generally consumed less sugar and extremely smaller portions overall. Today, sugar consumption is at an all-time high and I must admit I'm in that number of guilty consumers. On most occasions the sugar-laden drinks and foods that we consume contain minimal nutritional value and are easily available. These days you can find sugar in fast foods, highly processed (pre-packaged) foods, and even in foods deemed health foods. We should all be able to see that our sugar intake is not beneficial to our wallets or waistlines.

Whether you realize it, sugar has been one of society's biggest controversies, from the foundation of slave labor for profit and growth of the sugar industry, organizations banning soft drinks, schools removing it from lunch menus, and health care professionals advising consumers to reduce consumption or totally purge sugar from daily nutritional habits.

From first-hand experiences, it would seem that people would simply make lifestyle changes and eat better to prevent health problems. In my journey for better health, I initially discovered that most things I tried were only temporarily successful before falling off the wagon and ending up right back on that sugar train—but never really understanding how someone could fail so miserably.

To keep us unknowingly hitched to the sugar train, more sugar in the form of sweeteners and fruit juices are refined and incorporated into our foods and drinks for better taste. While refined sugars give us initial bliss and keep us wanting more, we seldom realize this sugar-monster is slowly robbing us of our health.

Sugar jeopardizes our health by contributing to the development of conditions such as high cholesterol levels and high blood pressure.

From my personal struggles, I've learned that sugar alone is not always the sole culprit. Increased sugar intake increases excess calories, excess calories increase our waistlines and our exposure to developing other health problems grows. The cycle is vicious and constantly repeats itself, creating the dangerous nature sugar has on our lives.

Not everyone believes that sugar is necessarily a factor in the expansion of our waistlines and the health crisis. But even as people are becoming more health conscious and it would seem that individually sugar consumption is on the decline, our waistlines are stilling expanding. As I worked through my own personal battle, I discovered that “hidden” sugar (known as high fructose corn syrup) is the likely suspect responsible for continuing health dilemmas.

This and other hidden sugars are also linked to heart disease and Type 2 diabetes, and as studies consistently show, women are at least twice as likely to die from these diseases as men. Yet again, there is some debate whether hidden sugar really causes the diseases or if the main cause is our excessive calorie consumption, with sugar as just one piece of the puzzle.

I would be remiss in not mentioning the addictive nature of sugar. Science tells us that sugar affects the brain in the same way that cocaine use affects the brain, producing cravings and habit-forming behavior that can be detrimental to our daily way of life.

So, while sugar may seem like heaven to our taste buds, we need to recognize the concerns that sugar places upon our quality of life, keeping us on a merry-go-round of uncontrollable urges and nutritionally bad choices.

Syretta Spears is assistant director of the UCF Simulation, Technology, Innovation and Modeling Center in the College of Nursing. She can be reached at Syretta.Spears@ucf.edu.